

TOOLKIT · VERSION 1

Sensory Regulation Guide

A working map of your sensory system — and how to keep it in range.

How to use this toolkit

Skim once, then choose one practice to try this week. Toolkits are living documents — mark them up, share them with your team, and revisit as your needs evolve.

Overview

Sensory regulation is the ongoing work of staying in a window of tolerance where you can think, feel, and engage. Neurodivergent nervous systems often have narrower windows and respond more strongly to inputs others barely register.

Why it matters

Unmanaged sensory load shows up as irritability, shutdown, meltdown, or exhaustion — not character flaws. Naming the input and giving the body a way to discharge or buffer it restores capacity faster than reasoning ever will.

Research summary

Sensory processing differences are documented across autism, ADHD, anxiety, PTSD, and brain injury populations (Tavassoli et al., 2014; Schauder & Bennetto, 2016). Occupational-therapy frameworks (Ayres; Dunn's Sensory Profile) provide validated tools for assessment and intervention.

Practical strategies

Reduce input

- Noise-cancelling headphones or loop-style filtered earplugs.
- Sunglasses, brimmed hat, or dimmer lighting for visual load.
- Plain clothing, tagless layers, predictable textures.

Add regulating input

- Deep pressure: weighted lap pad, compression layer, firm hug.
- Proprioceptive: brisk walk, wall push-ups, carrying weight.
- Vestibular: rocking, swinging, slow head turns.

Recover

- Schedule sensory recovery after high-load events — it is not optional.
- Low-light, low-talk transitions home from work or school.
- Hydration, protein, rest in that order.

Ready-to-use scripts & worksheets

Sensory inventory

Rate 1–5 today: light • sound • touch • smell • taste • movement • interoception. Circle the two highest. What is one buffer you can add in the next hour?

Recommended lessons & next steps

- Conditions: Sensory Processing, Autism — /conditions
- Family Toolkit: sensory-friendly homes — /family
- Faith Toolkit: sensory-friendly worship — /faith

Selected references & further reading

- Dunn W. *The Sensory Profile*. Pearson, 2014.
- Tavassoli T, et al. *The Sensory Perception Quotient (SPQ)*. Mol Autism. 2014.
- Schauder KB, Bennetto L. *Toward an interdisciplinary understanding of sensory dysfunction in autism*. Front Integr Neurosci. 2016.

Ask the AI Companion

Visit understandingneurodiversity.org/companion to ask follow-up questions about **Sensory Regulation Guide**. The Companion will recommend lessons, conditions, and research tailored to your role.